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RUEHAS/AMEMBASSY ALGIERS PRIORITY 7181
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NEA/MAG FOR LAWRENCE
PARIS FOR ZEYA

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KPAO](#) [TS](#)
SUBJECT: REPORTS OF ANTI-SEMITIC STUDENT DEMONSTRATION IN
TUNIS

¶1. (SBU) Summary: According to press reports and eyewitnesses, On March 10, approximately 100 students shouted anti-Israel and anti-Semitic slogans during a demonstration at Manouba University in Tunis at a ceremony marking the donation of books from the library of the late Jewish Tunisian historian Paul Sebag. The students briefly prevented the ceremony from proceeding, but university authorities reportedly effectively contained the small demonstration. While the events at Manouba were troubling, the sentiments expressed are likely those of only a small number of overzealous students. The majority of Tunisians draw a clear line between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism, as demonstrated by a communique from the Tunisian Human Rights League and a statement by the Manouba Student Union, both condemning the slogans and behavior at the Manouba demonstration. End Summary

¶2. (SBU) According to March 16 article in French newspaper Liberation, as well as university contacts, approximately 100 students demonstrated before and after a ceremony marking the donation of part of the personal library of Paul Sebag, a noted Tunisian Jewish historian and sociologist who died in ¶2004. Sebag's daughter, as well as French historian and President of the Society of the History of Jews in Tunisia, Claude Nataf, were present at the ceremony, presided by authorities from the Faculty of Letters at the University of Manouba. Upon attempting to enter the site of the ceremony, the party was met by approximately 100 students chanting anti-Israel and anti-Semitic slogans. Liberation reported that these slogans, said in Arabic, included: "Down with Israel", "Long live Palestine and Hamas", "No normalization with Israel" and "The Jews to the Sea". (NB: A French cultural attache who was present at the event reported that students also chanted some anti-Tunisian regime slogans).

¶3. (SBU) Students reportedly tried to physically prevent the invitees from entering the facility, at which point professors formed a human chain to separate the invitees from the demonstrating students. Eventually all invitees were able to enter the facility and the ceremony was held. Students reportedly continued the demonstrations upon the exit of the invitees and event organizers. According to the Liberation article and eyewitnesses, there were no police present during the demonstration. An unnamed GOT official told Liberation that Tunisian police "can not enter university campuses." In the wake of the event, the University of Manouba Student Union met and, according to university faculty, sided with university deans in condemning the demonstrations as "irresponsible." The Tunisian Human

Rights League also released a statement strongly denouncing the demonstration and the "racist attacks which dishonored our students and our university, and which represent an attack on human valor." The LTDH communique also described the linkage between Zionism and Judaism as "inadmissible", "a disservice to the cause of the Palestinian people", and the "essential base of Zionist thought".

14. (SBU) Comment: Professors at the University of Manouba were concerned by the physical nature of the demonstration, noting that student rallies and demonstrations do occur but are generally peaceful. Other student contacts report sporadic incidences of violence during campus demonstrations, citing rocks thrown through university building windows as a common tactic of only "a few troublemakers among an otherwise peaceful group of students." One professor described "the deep confusion in the minds of students about the difference between anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism." Indeed, a majority of Tunisians would concur with the LTDH communique, and draw a clear line between condemning Israel and defending Tunisia's small, but notable Jewish population.
HUDSON